

State Representative • 22nd District
Brendan Williams
Majority External Relations Leader



2008 Legislative Review



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Brendan's Committee Assignments:

- Commerce & Labor
- Judiciary
- Rules
- Transportation

For an up-to-date list of all bills I worked on, please go to:

<http://www.leg.wa.gov/House/Williams/SponsoredBills.htm>

The 60-day legislative session ended March 13, and our district came out ahead in many respects.

As a member of the House Transportation Committee, I amended our supplemental transportation budget to continue, for another year, Washington State Patrol investigation of local county road accidents — delaying the transfer of that costly responsibility to Thurston County. Furthermore, in that very tight budget, we held onto future Thurston County construction money.

Among many local projects, our supplemental capital budget has money to purchase an Olympia office complex adjacent to the Capitol Campus that I hope will serve as the site of a future child care facility. We also budgeted to relocate to west Olympia the existing Capitol Campus Child Care Center, which is being displaced by construction.

Our supplemental operating budget leaves \$850 million in reserves on a two-year budget. Saving that much after two years is not bad considering that, since September 2006, the Bush Administration has added almost twice that to our federal debt every day! Comparatively, under Governor Gregoire our state is both spending, and saving, very responsibly.

Indeed, considerable state spending is driven by federal cuts. For example, we added \$6.25 million for community mental health and \$21.2 million for special education and Medicaid funding because the Bush Administration eliminated federal funding streams. In the absence of federal action, we must also spend \$3.7 million on a standby rescue tugboat at Neah Bay to avert the risk of an oil spill catastrophe.

Far from helping our state, the Bush Administration is now outsourcing a military aerospace contract to France that would have meant thousands of Boeing manufacturing jobs here in Washington.

On the policy front, bills I co-sponsored include a landmark ignition interlock bill for drunk drivers (such devices are effective in reducing drunk driving); a bill expanding domestic partnership rights; a bill requiring the state to plan to cut greenhouse gas emissions and build a "green collar" work force by encouraging clean-energy businesses; and a first-in-the-nation bill to prohibit toxic toys for children.

On the House Commerce & Labor Committee, I also worked for a bill allowing unpaid leaves of absence for military personnel so spouses can spend time with loved ones about to be deployed to war, or on leave from deployment. Military families deserve no less.

It's been an honor representing you. Please always feel free to contact me, with the best means being e-mail at williams.brendan@leg.wa.gov.

Best Regards,

Brendan Williams
State Representative
22nd Legislative District



Tougher drunk-driving laws



Leave for military personnel



Funding child care needs



Local road construction projects

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Bills I Prime-Sponsored

In a short session, most of the action is in co-sponsoring bills, with a number of my prime-sponsored, House-passed, bills passing Senate committees only to then “die” due to lack of time. However, four bills of mine did pass into law this session — covering issues ranging from landlord-tenant relations; providing collective bargaining rights sought by the Washington State Patrol Troopers Association; defining professional standards for massage practitioners; and even modifying industrial insurance coverage for geoduck harvesters.

My hardest fought bill, EHB 1865, responded to a Court of Appeals’ ruling requiring that landlords store evicted tenants’ property. Last year I persuaded the House to overturn this requirement, but my bill stalled in the Senate. My concern was that it damages housing affordability to require other tenants to subsidize storage costs. So this year I advanced a compromise between advocates for tenants’ rights and landlords to clarify a landlord is only obligated to store an evicted tenant’s property if the tenant requests storage in writing within three days of eviction. This compromise showed the legislative process working at its best.



In addition, the language of a fifth bill of mine was fully incorporated into the supplemental operating budget to authorize \$50,000 in incentive grants at the University of Washington Medical School to support medical research or medical training projects that improve medical services to persons with developmental disabilities.



Sought by disabilities’ rights advocates, my effort responded to studies finding that few medical professionals, beyond pediatricians, have the training necessary to attend to the special needs

of patients with disabilities. As the uncle of nephews with disabilities, I firmly believe a just society leaves no one behind, and honors all its citizens.

Inertia Trumps Progress Again on Homeowners’ Rights

Politics is an echo chamber of self-congratulation and the clamor of special interest groups. Too often the voice of everyday citizens goes unheard or unheeded. Politicians tend not to acknowledge such occasions, but we had one (again) this year with a Homeowners’ Bill of Rights. The story deserves telling.

I’ve never received more desperate, heartfelt, unscripted messages – from people statewide – than I have about homeowners’ rights. For example, an entire subdivision of residents in west Olympia complained about construction defects in their new homes.

Two constituents, in particular, stand out: Karen Veldheer, a busy mother of young children living in a home requiring tens of thousands of dollars of repair due to water damage, and Scott Thalhamer, a retired Marine gunnery sergeant, who was shown on KOMO-4 News and in *The Olympian* standing in water under new homes.

Yet, once again, efforts faltered to give these purchasers of new single-family homes statutory warranty rights that those purchasing condominiums have. As they have been ever since a home warranties’ legislative workgroup met in 1999, the building industry was successful in denying homeowners’ rights – even after this year’s bill passed the full Senate *and* the House Judiciary Committee upon which I serve.

Most new homes, including my own, are built well. Home-building is a vital part of our economy. However, so is *home-buying*. And those buying new homes should be entitled to some meaningful protection for their lives’ greatest investments. Four years of legal protection on a new home – requiring builders to fix their mistakes – seems pretty reasonable given a homeowner’s usual 30-year mortgage obligation.



Scott Thalhamer, a resident of the Cooper Crest development, walks through the crawlspace under his neighbor’s house to show the foot or more of water pooling there. Photo by Toni L. Bailey. Reprinted with permission of the Olympian.

Once again, homeowners’ rights had broad citizen as well as editorial board support. And, once again, homeowners beset with construction defects must continue waiting for justice. As the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* editorialized, with evident sarcasm, “Surely those stuck with flooded homes and rotting walls can wait another year.”

I think of the Wheatley family – Alex, Bryan, Carson, Lisa and Sara – whose new home was plagued by leaks and toxic mold (the builder offered them \$35,000 toward \$100,000 in costs), that e-mailed me to say:

It looks as though our boat is about to sink, and we still can’t believe without the builder taking full responsibility for the poor workmanship. We will end up with nothing but accrued debt for all the medical bills and belongings we had to discard. We hope this doesn’t continue to happen to other innocent families.

More boats will sink before the Legislature reconvenes in 2009. I gave this battle all I had this year, and was honored to do so alongside so many constituents like Karen and Scott. But their quest for justice continues. And we shall overcome.

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